DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 276 042 CS 210 150

AUTHOR Marsella, Joy; Whitlock, Roger
TITLE An English Department Reexamines Itself: Becoming a Department of Literacy.
PUB DATE 14 Mar 86
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (37th, New Orleans, LA, March 13-15, 1986).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Curriculum Development; *Curriculum Evaluation; *Educational Development; Educational Improvement; *English Curriculum; *English Departments; English Instruction; *Faculty Development; Faculty Evaluation; Higher Education; Program Descriptions; Self Evaluation (Groups); *Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS *University of Hawaii Manoa

ABSTRACT

In the past 5 years, the University of Hawaii (UH) English Department has undergone significant changes in curriculum, staff, and students. Freshman English was formerly taught by lecturers, but is now the shared responsibility of all professors on the English faculty. The maximum class enrollment has been decreased from 25 students to 20. Previously, little emphasis was placed on writing across the curriculum; soon all students will be required to take five writing intensive courses before graduation, and the department now offers a master's program in composition studies. Finally, the English department has actively assumed responsibility for community literacy through its sponsorship of the Hawaii Writing Project. These departmental changes were effected by questioning customary teaching habits and reexamining educational goals, priorities, and procedures. The curriculum reflects the resulting paradigmatic shifts--several writing courses have been added at the remedial, intermediate and advanced levels. A campuswide writing committee has been formed to examine university writing requirements. The remodeled program places equal emphasis on both quality teaching and research in literature and writing and can act as a model for English departments where writing and literature programs must co-exist and complement one another in their missions of teaching and research. (JD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED276042

"An English Department Reexamines Itself: Becoming a Department of Literacy"*

Joy Marsella and Roger Whitlock
Department of English
University of Hawaii at Manoa
Honolulu, Hawaii

for presentation at
Conference on College Composition and Communication
March 14, 1986
New Orleans

in a session on

PARADIGMS AND PEDAGOGY:
HOW PARADIGM SHIFTS AFFECT TEACHING AND ADMINISTRATION

*Our thanks to colleagues Thomas Hilgers and Suzanne Jacobs, whose discussions helped us identify and clarify the issues presented in this paper.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Joy Marsella

Roger Whitlock

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS 210150

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

At the University of Hawaii, English 100 used to be taught mostly by lecturers; now all professors share responsibility for teaching it. English 100 used to enroll 25 students; now enrollment is limited to 20. There used to be little emphasis on writing-across-the-curriculum; soon all students will be required to take five writing-intensive courses before graduation. There used to be no opportunity for graduate work in composition studies within the department; now students can take an M.A. specialty in composition studies and we expect a doctoral program will be approved very soon that will offer the same opportunity. There used to be no composition specialist on the graduate faculty; now there are four. The English Department used to assume little responsibility for community literacy; now the department sponsors the Hawaii Writing Project. All these changes have occurred within the last five years. My paper today describes how they came about.

As you can see, paradigm changes by definition alter institutions and their systems of operation. Commonly held beliefs, accepted practices, and customary modes of behavior are called into question and, however slowly and painfully, challenged and sometimes changed. These changes occur through explanations, discussions, challenges, and compromises. I sometimes imagine these negotiations as tugging and pulling the paradigm around.

Although I will focus primarily on the changes that have affected the curriculum and faculty, I hope to suggest the impact they are having on our students and the larger community and to reveal some of the problems that have arisen as a result of them.

Let me create a context by describing the University of Hawaii. We have a campus of some 20,000 students--mostly from Oahu but also from the neighbor islands, the mainland, Asia, and the Pacific--and a department of some 75 full-time members. We have 180 undergraduate English majors, a number that has slowly increased in the last five years. We offer only the M.A. degree in our graduate program (we have 50 full-time graduate students) but have recently prepared a proposal for the doctorate that will probably be approved and put into place within the year.

Composition is a program within the Department, as is creative writing. There are six people with FTE positions who would describe themselves as composition specialists and another on early retirement who teaches a course in professional editing each semester. This year our ranks have been strengthened by two visiting composition specialists. All six of us teach courses in the literature as well as writing program. One of those six, a full-fledged composition specialist, was hired only this academic year. The commitment of this position to composition was a validation of our efforts to gain full program status. This position was especially important because the

other five of us have come to the specialty without much in the way of formal graduate training in composition studies. Four of us came to the department as Instructors with M.A.s on tenure-track positions. We now have doctorates in various disciplines and tenured. Four of us are on the graduate faculty.

HOW THE CURRICULUM IS AFFECTED

Our curriculum reflects the change that, by definition, occurs in a paradigm shift. Let me use as an example the course most central to writing instruction at the university--English 100.

Perhaps the most profound change occurred three years ago when the Department, led by a Chair and Assistant Chair sympathetic to Composition Studies, voted that every faculty member would take his or her turn teaching 100, thus making the course everyone's responsibility and moving it to a central place in our curriculum. The majority of the sections had previously been staffed by lecturers, the rest by first-year professors and others assigned punitively to the course. Now the majority are staffed by fulltime faculty members. Two years later, our dean was persuaded to limit enrollment in those classes to 20.

The move led us to examine more critically what we do in 100. The Composition Committee, which includes members from the literature program, has rewritten our course description twice. We have prepared

a document called "On Evaluating Writing in English 100" that discusses problems of evaluation, presents a rubric, provides samples of A, B, C, D, and F papers, along with discussions of the strengths and weaknesses of the paper to explain its grade. It is leading this year to more uniformity in the way we respond to and evaluate student essays and makes our exit standards more uniform.

We have experimented with several different models of training new instructors of writing, a delicate problem when "new" instructors are associate and full professors rather than teaching assistants and lecturers. We have offered discussions on how to teach revision, to design assignment sequences, to use peer evaluation groups, and to understand differences between the way skilled writers and novice writers compose. Sixty people attended the latter session. In spite of all our accomplishments, however, it is still difficult to gain concensus on what should happen in 100 when professors operate in all four of what James Berlin has categorized as the classicist, current-traditional, expressionist, and neo-rhetorical paradigms. I might add here that professors won't be led to "new paradigm" teaching by textbooks, since the majority of them are still largely based on the current-traditional model.

The rest of the curriculum has been altered too. We used to have no option other than the Writing Workshop for those students who needed ongoing help beyond English 100 but who were not yet ready for advanced

writing courses. We have added English 109, a follow-up to 100 for such students. We used to have no courses at the intermediate level; now we have several. We've also added 400-level courses in argument and editing to follow our 300-level advanced expository writing. Now our program offers students the opportunity for logical and continuous writing development at all levels.

At the graduate level, we used to offer only one course in theory and practice of teaching writing. We have recently had approved an M.A. specialty in composition, in which students define their specialty by taking two seminars and writing a thesis in the area of composition studies. The first __ students are now starting through the program.

The role that composition studies would play in the proposed doctoral program proved more controversial. Composition specialists were concerned that doctoral candidates in composition studies would not be forced to do double-duty, mastering everything in the literature specialties, in addition to mastering the materials of composition studies. Trying to develop such a program proved problemmatic since no composition specialist sat on the graduate program committee that wrote the proposal, an oversight that was corrected as a result of the tugging and pulling that occurred when the department considered and finally approved the proposal. The composition specialists were eager to have options for doctoral students in their area while the literature specialists feared that a "bunch of high school teachers"

would innundate the program and somehow lower its standards. For all our success, composition studies still has a second-rate, service connotation in the eyes of some professors.

A campuswide writing committee has been formed, which I chair, to examine writing requirements at the university and, if necessary, to propose curriculum changes. The committee will probably recommend a program for the underprepared writing student to follow a placement exam and a program for establishing a series of writing-intensive courses at upper levels. The College of Arts and Sciences has already approved five such courses, a number that the committee will probably support for the rest of the Colleges. To inform its work, the Committee has conducted a survey of professors on student writing abilities and problems and a pilot proficiency placement exam--both have served as faculty consciousness-raising devices on how writing serves students across the campus.

Other pockets of contagious activity will bring writing into a more central place in the curriculum. There is a university-wide writing committee dealing with articulation across our university's seven different campuses. I have already mentioned the College of Arts and Sciences committee that got the five writing-intensive courses approved. The College of Tropical Agriculture received an educational improvement grant for workshops on integrating writing into their various courses, and the College of Education is studying the writing

abilities of its students. Our challenge is to harness the energy in these various efforts in a concerted way that will improve the overall curriculum, a problem that is not easily resolved when the leaders and proponents of each of these groups has different needs, agendas, and loyalties. More tugging and pulling.

The Department has also begun to assume responsibility for community literacy through its support of the Hawaii Writing Project. In 1980 when the site was established, the Department chair granted me a one-course reduction to direct it. Six years later, I still get the reducation but, more important, the Project is funded for $24,000 a year through the UH Arts & Sciences budget (which includes a half-time student secretary for me, by the way).

Those of you familiar with the NWP network know the school-university collaborative model under which it operates. We have now conducted six Summer Institutes which enrolled 160 teachers from public and private schools and from all levels on all of our islands. In addition, we have conducted 36 multi-session Inservice workshops for over 700 teachers, and our teacher/consultants have given hundreds of single-session presentations throughout the community. This network of support for writing is slowly improving the teaching of writing throughout the state. Faculty who have been at the university a number of years feel that incoming students are writing better than they did a few years ago.

Ultimately, of course, this examination of curriculum leads us to question the role and place of writing at the university. What is writing anyway? Do we relegate it to skill status or assign it discipline status through the establishment of a special departmental or program status apart from English, a position that Maxine Hairston has challenged us to consider. It seems to me that Mike Rose's concept of writing as an enabling discipline is probably the most helpful way of thinking of it, a framework that unfortunately doesn't answer the question of where the administrative offices of such a program should be located. At UH we believe that the English Department is a place for quality teaching and research in both literature and in writing.

HOW THE FACULTY IS AFFECTED

Why do we believe in working toward such a model where quality teaching and research in literature and writing are given equal respect and have equal viability? Let me explain by discussing some of the ways the roles of composition specialists have changed in the past few years.

I have already discussed how theymoved from instructorships to tenured positions and how they have been given appointments to key decision-making committees both within the department and the larger university. They have also begun to receive research reductions so they have time to write the essays that will contribute to the profession and lead to their promotion.

Their outreach has gone beyond the university to the larger community as well. Composition specialists act as consultants and collect data for research in the community, much as professors in the social sciences and most professional schools do. The benefits underlying this model work two ways: the larger community benefits from the outreach activities of individual faculty members; the quality of faculty members and their department or schools is determined in part by the size and frequency of their outreach efforts.

What kind of consulting do composition specialists do? All of us have given workshops for public and private school teachers and students. All of us have given presentations in the network of Institutes and In-service programs sponsored by the Hawaii Writing Project. Let me explain in more detail how one consultant's work is affecting the community.

Suzanne Jacobs consults with a small private university in their writing across the curriculum program. In addition to providing testing information, helping organize workshops, and giving presentations, she has encouraged teachers to investigate the role of writing in learning. She is collaborating with a chemistry professor on a teacher-as-researcher project that explores the confusion students face in their lab report format, the linguistic roots of this confusions, and the steps that will be taken in teaching the lab report format in the future. The project is a model for one type of master's thesis. Though the one-to-one model of consulting is small in scale,

the numbers ultimately affected by such a model of collaboration are large, as this chemistry professor has taken a leadership role in helping his colleaguess in the natural sciences understand what he has learned about the role of writing in learning.

This collaboration benefits both the individual consultants and the Department of English. People in the community--in the public and private schools and the small colleges and community colleges--have been made aware that the faculty in our department are willing and able to offer help. At the same time, individual research and teacher-research helps us understand methods and issues. Consequently, we are better able to teach, and there is greater demand for our expanding program in the teaching of writing. The identity of the composition specialist is, in this way, made clear, and the status of the English Department is improved.

SPECULATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

On the one hand, this account sounds like a success story, although I think I included enough of the tugging and pulling to show how relative that success is. On the other hand, it is a model for departments of English in which writing and literature programs can co-exist and complement one another in their missions of teaching and research. I have been told by some members of our department that they would rather teach intro writing courses than intro lit courses--it is

more difficult to teach our students to read well than it is to write well. Certainly the possibilities exist for us to explore the relationships between reading and writing and to learn how expressive writing can enhance understanding of texts we study in literature classes.

Problems--and doubtless more negotiations--remain. For example, there are still misunderstandings to be cleared up over the unfortunate process/product dichotomy: will those who have been labeled "process" people (and therefore soft and "touchy-feely") ever be able to convince their colleagues that they also attend to product? Will we someday be able to have a single writing program, so that those of us in composition need not suffer from the negative connotations that composition elicits and can draw instead on the more positive ones associated with "creative" writing?

Still, the prognosis appears to be positive. Many of the newly-hired assistant professors in our literature program are familiar with what is going on in the field. We are working under a sympathetic Chair, Dean, and President. We are now negotiating from a position of greater strength. We six composition specialists realize that through our various collaborations we are agents who bring about change. The paradigm shift just doesn't happen.

We need to keep reminding ourselves that the deliberation and debate the paradigm change provokes are healthy even though the tugging and pulling sometimes results in bruises to our ego. When composition specialists and their programs are empowered, the rest of the department and the students they serve benefit from increased excellence. They also offer hope of escape from further dividing of the university.